

WAS THE FAMOUS SUPPER AT SHERRY'S IMMORAL?

THE SEELEY ENTERTAINMENT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FROM A SOCIOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW.



The young women whose pictures are on this page are the young women who are said to have been present at the Sherry dinner the other night. Ordinarily, their pictures would be as interesting as the pictures of any other clever vaudeville actresses. As it is, they have an especial interest, from the fact that they were participants in an affair about which the whole town is talking—and with reason. The staid, matter-of-fact New Yorker wonders whether it is true that Americans who have money are no longer willing to amuse themselves in the old more or less conventional but hitherto satisfactory ways. He thinks of the show at Artist Brees's studio where a fire was extinguished with champagne, and he thinks of the Sherry raid. And he wonders



THE SKIRT DANCER AS A SOCIETY RAD

Out of Captain Chapman's raid at Sherry's has grown public knowledge of a kind of private entertainment hitherto kept strictly secret.

It has developed that the singers and dancers who appeared there in the

for police interference. Whether these are immoral or not must be settled by the reader's own judgment. At any rate, it is evident that they are very common.

These are the facts, already well known through the daily papers: Mr. Herbert Barnum Seeley, one of the best known of the younger New York society men, and a grandson of P. T. Barnum, the great showman, gave a dinner at Sherry's in honor of his brother's approaching marriage. The affair was attended by men whose standing in the social and business world is of the very highest. As a diversion to the monotony of the successive courses, Mr. Seeley arranged with a vaudeville booking agency to furnish sufficient performers to make out an evening's entertainment.

The police allege that the booking firm was named by the name of Annabelle as an immodest and immoral dance, that, acting on information furnished by her stepfather, they forced their way to the dining room. Not seeing any-

thing in violation of the law, they left.

The performers of the affair were persons known to the vaudeville world as reputable performers. All of them have played engagements at New York houses where vaudeville is presented.

So much for the facts. They reveal an interesting state of affairs that were before known only to the inner circles of the bachelor society of the town.

The idea came from Paris. Wealthy Parisian society folk, in casting about for something new, something bizarre and startling, hit upon the scheme of presenting a vaudeville show to their guests. Like all fads, it drifted to New York. The swell clubs became its best friends. Stag parties at the clubhouses or the swell restaurants of the city became stupid and dull without the variety feature. For the past three years or more it has been whispered among the young men of society that there were many interesting performances at these affairs. But the whispering was decidedly under the rose, and it kept within the boundaries of

what is termed society. The outer world heard nothing of it. Nor would it, had it not been for the prominence attracted to this class of entertainments by Captain Chapman's now famous raid.

Now the wise old world is shaking its head and asking: "Has the half been

It is a fact that of late years there has sprung up a number of agencies which do little else than arrange affairs of this kind. Their list of performers includes nearly all of the well-known variety performers who are known to New York vaudeville houses. But there is an element among the persons listed with agencies of this nature that the public know nothing about. They do not appear at any of the theatres, simply because they have found that they can make more money by appearing at two or three club and private shows during the week than by seeking regular engagements at regular theatres.

The Sherry raid and its contingent disclosures of this one feature of the social bachelor life of the metropolis opens up a most interesting field of discussion.

Certain preachers have made sensational statements in their attacks on wealth and society. They have said that the luxury of this nation would work its downfall, as did the reign of sumptuous entertainments and lavish expenditure of money work the beginning of the end of beautiful, grand old Rome.

Our tastes are similar to the Romans in many ways. We lack the brutality, true, and the fiendish pleasures of eighteen hundred years ago are repulsive to the people who live in the latter end of the nineteenth century. But there is present the persistent, unrelenting seeking for something new, something to shock and surprise.

In the olden days in Rome the amusements ran to brutality and torture. Can you imagine a state of society in which it revelled in physical agony? You need not imagine it; merely regard it from the records. What kind of society was that which attended the circus in the reign of Caligula, Claudius or Nero?

Our vocabulary falls short in describing it. There came a time when a fight royal between gladiators and wild beasts was voted dull and stupid. The imperial showman had to burn men alive, and nail convicts to crosses where they could be slowly torn by hungry bears. All this to satisfy the everlasting cry for variety.

Heliogabalus and Galerius did not entertain their guests with singers and dancers. But they bought prisoners of war and slaves that they might have them tortured while state dinners were in progress. Probably Nero had more infernal enterprise than any of these royal managers, for he rolled living Christians in oiled tow and stuck them in his gardens, where they illuminated with their slow agony the gay Romans that he lured into his domain and who mingled their badinage with the groans of the victims.

Their sensuality is a part of their history. Cleopatra has been preserved to us by the rankness of her amours. The acid balsam of Egypt has kept her an ideal mummy in romance to our day.

Briefly epitomized, the ancient Romans in their amusements went to extremes that repulse and disgust. They went absolutely to the very end of human conceptions in their search for amusements. Could more be done in the nineteenth century? With the passage of time has come new standards, new codes, new ideals. What to Rome was a joyous holiday would be to New York a horrible butchery.

"Sensuality," says Lecky, "is the vice of young men and old nations. A languid epicureanism is the general condition of nations which have attained a high intellectuality or social condition, but which through political causes have no adequate sphere for the exertion of their energies."



In the past five years the successes of the theatrical world have not been the productions that appeal to the culture and the intellect. The rare cases where a different result has been reached are the exceptions which prove the rule. Managers have gone as far toward sensuality as public opinion would let them.

Rumor whispers that society goes as far as the law will allow. With the Romans, the entertainers made the laws, and so moulded them as to suit their whims and fads. Modern society looks down on the average legislator as in another class, but it respects his handiwork. Politics it votes nasty, unless it rises to the dignity of statesmanship, but judges must be no respecters of persons, so they obey the laws.

The Romans obeyed what laws were on the statute books. New York does also. The very acme of cruelty and torture was reached in their demands for amusements.

New York goes as far as it dares without courting trouble. With each it is a case of extremes.

Does it portend the same result? Nations are judged by the amusements of its society. As the pleasures are, so will be the religion, the manners.

Sturdy England, with its conservative, heavy, oftentimes dense people, has a bulwark of strength in that same heaviness and conservatism. Pleasure loving, amusement seeking France is a nest of political intrigues and plottings.

When the society of a nation is idle and has nothing to occupy its attention but new pleasures, it creates a sense of impending danger. One hundred years ago the accredited members of New York's Four Hundred were men who lived healthy, normal lives, with their business affairs to attend to by day and their families to rejoice at night. Balls, theatres, parties—these they enjoyed, but in moderation and taste. There was none of the bizarre in their demands, none of the extreme. Their usual was dispelled with healthier amusements than these.

In these latter days it is the unnatural and unhealthy that attracts. The more extraordinary, the more suggestive, the more successful. The reason is not far to seek. Millions of dollars and nothing to occupy a man's time except to spend it is a dangerous combination. As solitary imprisonment breeds madness, so does an unoccupied brain create an insatiable demand for successive shocks.

A NEW X RAY WONDER.

A Scotch Official Says the Rays Will Enable the Law to Discover a Child's Father.

The subtle Scotch mind of Mr. Campbell Smith, Sheriff of Dundee, has discovered a new and startling use for the X ray. He believes that by throwing the rays on a child so as to reveal its bones it will be possible in many cases to decide who its father is when that is in doubt. In Scotland the Sheriff is a magistrate. In a recent paternity case which came before Mr. Campbell Smith he added the following note to his decision:

"I know that the facial features of a child may be, and often are, as a matter of general appearance, derived from any living or painted face that the mother may have a fancy to and opportunity to look upon. But I also know that parts of the body, such as the feet—the whole hidden skeleton, in short—which the mother never could see, must, in so far as differing widely from her, be derived from the father. In so far as it clearly resembles him. The new or X photography, which enables a comparison to be made in the shape of the bones, taken along with the general appearance and form of the other parts of the body not open to ordinary inspection, affords a means of demonstrating paternity about as clearly as science can demonstrate any fact."

London, Dec. 26.—This winter two fashionable real ice skating rinks much more than fill the place of the single one of last year in London and of the single Palais de Glace in Paris. At the best of the London rinks the admission time for skating is five shillings, or a dollar and a quarter, as against half a dollar at night and in the morning.

An American puff of Lady Randolph Churchill's grace on skates has been widely copied here, and the truth is that she skates better than Mrs. Langtry or any other of the titled women who try to imitate her. But the field, greatest of sporting papers, is out to-day with a most eulogistic notice of yet another fair American who dazzles the senses with her skill. It says:

"London, at the present moment, has the opportunity of witnessing skating as practised in America, with the additional attraction to the average sight-seer of the exponent being a lady. Taking the style to mean the execution of figures without much reference to the subsequent maintenance of edge or continuity, it is doubtful if it could be put forward in much more attractive form than by Miss Mabel Davidson, the young lady in question, who comes from St. Paul, Minnesota, where she learned her skating, the development of her present excellence having come about in the last two winters.

"A professional exhibition necessarily has showy features introduced, and in Miss Davidson's case these assume the shape of dancing on the toes and skipping forward and backward, skating the 'trap' back-

with the body crouched down close to the ice. But plenty of excellent skating is seen, the lady being a vigorous skater, and very powerful on both edges. Nothing could be better done, in its way, than the spring from inside forward to outside back, and the execution of the grapevine figures, in union with the waltz music.

"One of these grapevines has a very bold spread-eagle introduced, which is made with splendid go; and into another a curtsy, as the feet come together, that has a very pretty effect. Mohawks and double and triple turns are made to perfection, but we saw no sign of reeling or counter-reeling turns, or of enroulements, though we cannot say we regretted. We were sorry to learn that the vigor which is brushed into the skating, lasting continuously from fifteen to twenty minutes, causes complete exhaustion and sometimes collapse. One would expect the management to provide against this by means of a short rest, which could be easily filled in by the urbane gentlemen in gray and green, who are usually so much in evidence at the National Skating Palace, where the exhibition takes place. Miss Davidson uses right-angled skates of no less than one-quarter inch in breadth."

JULIAN RALPH.

